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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 002344

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DEPARTMENT FOR PRM/AFR; AF/C; EUR/ERA

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SUBJECT: EU ON FORCED RETURN OF RWANDAN ASYLUM SEEKERS

REF: (A) STATE (B) BRUSSELS 2091

Classified By: PRMOFF MARC J. MEZNAR. REASONS 1/4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (U) PRMOFF raised reftel points with DG Development Burundi/Rwanda desk officer Dietmar Krissler and EU Council Secretariat General officer for Central Africa Peter Clausen.

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¶2. (C) Krissler said that during Commissioner Louis Michel's meeting with Rwandan President Kagame on June 1 and a subsequent telephone conversation with Burundian President Ndayizeye, he expressed the EU's concern over the developing situation regarding the Rwandan asylum seekers in Burundi. Michel appealed for both countries to cooperate with the UNHCR and to respect international humanitarian law. According to Krissler, President Kagame said that the flight of the Rwandans was an obstacle to national reconciliation; rumors had provoked their departure. Rwanda's desire for their return coincided with Burundi's objective to get them out.

¶3. (C) The EU dispatched its Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Aldo Ajello to Burundi on June 15 to assess the situation. Despite the forced expulsions, the EU is reluctant to apply pressure on either government. Commissioner Michel is reportedly sympathetic to Rwanda's plight. Furthermore, the holding of democratic elections in Burundi is a high priority for the EU and the refugee dynamic was seen as a potentially destabilizing factor. Krissler also said that the possibility of tension in the region is very high with the scheduled end of the transitional government in the DRC on June 30.

¶4. (C) At this point, there does not seem much willingness on the part of either the EC or the Member States to issue a strong statement, similar to the one made by the U.S., or to take punitive measures against either Rwanda or Burundi.

SCHNABEL

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